

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, IS
SUBJECT: THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AFTER RABIN'S RESIGNATION

1. THE RABIN RESIGNATION AND THE SWIFT TRANSFER OF PARTY LEADERSHIP TO PERES HAS LEFT THE PARTIES OPPOSING THE ALIGNMENT IN NEXT MONTH'S ELECTION WITH THE PROBLEM OF ADJUSTING CAMPAIGN STRATEGY TOWARD A SLIGHTLY CHANGED TARGET. WHAT WAS WIDELY VIEWED AS A LUCKY BREAK FOR THE OPPOSITION DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS FOLLOWING RABIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT APPEARS NOW TO BE LESS OF A BONANZA TO THE ALIGNMENT'S RIVALS. WITH PERES LEADING THE ALIGNMENT, THE ISSUE OF "CHANGE" HAS LOST SOME OF ITS CUTTING EDGE FOR PARTIES LIKE THE LIKUD AND THE DMC, BOTH OF WHICH ARE BETTING HEAVILY ON CHANGE AS THE PRIMARY ISSUE OF THE CAMPAIGN.

2. THE LIKUD, IN PARTICULAR, WAS DELIGHTED WITH RABIN'S VICTORY IN FEBRUARY, BELIEVING THAT HE WAS AN EASIER MARK THAN PERES. ENACHEM BEGIN
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CHALLENGED RABIN TO A TELEVISION DEBATE, CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITY TO OUTCLASS THE PRIME MINISTER IN SPEAKING. EZER WEIZMAN HAD OPENLY ADMITTED THAT HE "DEARLY HOPED" RABIN WOULD BE THE ALIGNMENT CANDIDATE BECAUSE THAT WOULD MAKE HIS JOB (LIKUD CAMPAIGN MANGER) EASIER. ON THE OTHER HAND, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION, LIKUD AND DMC LEADERS SAW IN THE

BANK ACCOUNT AFFAIR A WINDFALL FOR THEIR ATTACKS ON LABOR PARTY CORRUPTION. AN ADDED BONUS WAS SEEN IN THE EXPECTED DEFECTION FROM THE ALIGNMENT OF MAPAM AND THE ANTICIPATED DEEP SPLIT WITHIN LABOR OVER THE NOMINATION OF PERES. THIS VISION OF ALIGNMENT TROUBLES HAS NOW PALED. AT THE PRESENT MOMENT, THE OPPOSITION IS FACED WITH AN INTACT ALIGNMENT, THE LABOR PARTY SEEMINGLY MORE UNITED THAN BEFORE ITS CRISIS, THE CORRUPTION ISSUE BLUNTED BY RABIN'S QUICK ACTION IN STEPPING DOWN (WHICH ACTUALLY GENERATED A WAVE OF SYMPATHY IN HIS BEHALF) AND, PERHAPS MOST SIGNIFICANT, A LEADER WHO SPEAKS WELL, IS A HARD CAMPAIGNER, REPRESENTS AT LEAST SOME CHANGE AND IS PROBABLY SOMEWHAT MORE POPULAR WITH THE ELECTORATE THAN WAS RABIN.

3. ALL THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE ALIGNMENT HAS EMERGED UNSCATHED. RABIN'S CONTINUED INCUMBENCY AS PRIME MINISTER MAY PROVE TO BE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE LABOR PARTY. MOREOVER, IF A GROUNDSWELL BASED ON THE MANY REVELATIONS OF SCANDAL IS DEVELOPING TO "THROW THE RASCALS OUT," RABIN'S BANK ACCOUNT IS ONE MORE STRAW.

4. IN THIS VEIN A LIKUD INSIDER (BEN ELISSAR) SOMEWHAT RUEFULLY ADMITTED TO US THAT THE NEW SITUATION IN THE ALIGNMENT IS "A MIXTURE OF PLUSES AND MINUSES," THE CHALLENGE FOR A TELEVISION DEBATE STILL STANDS, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BUT THE LIKUD IS NOW SOMEWHAT CONCERNED OVER ITS OUTCOME. NOT ONLY IS PERES MORE ATTRACTIVE ON TELEVISION THAN RABIN, BUT BEGIN'S HEALTH MAY DETRACT FROM HIS APPEARANCE AND PERFORMANCE. OUR SOURCE SEES ONE ASPECT OF THE NEW LABOR LINEUP AS HELPING HIS PARTY: HE BELIEVES ALLON IS NOT PARTICULARLY POPULAR IN THE COUNTRY AND HIS ASCENDANCY IN THE ALIGNMENT WILL BE VIEWED INDIFFERENTLY BY THE PUBLIC. IN PARTICULAR, THE NAMING OF ALLON AS DEFENSE MINISTER-DESIGNATE WILL NOT ELICIT ANY CHEERS SINCE HE IS CONSIDERED SOMEWHAT INDECISIVE FOR A DEFENSE MINISTER.

5. THE DMC, HOWEVER, MAY ACTUALLY LOSE FROM LAST WEEK'S TURN OF EVENTS--AN ACCELERATION OF A DECLINE THAT SEEMED TO HAVE SET IN FOLLOWING ITS INTERNAL ELECTION LAST MONTH. YADIN'S NEW PARTY HAD BEEN WAXING RICH ON DEFECTIONS FROM THE RANKS OF LABOR VOTERS. IT WAS THE EASY ALTERNATIVE FOR

ISRAELIS WHO SAW IN RABIN'S VICTORY AT THE LABOR PARTY CONVENTION "MORE OF THE SAME OLD THING." PERES MAY NOW ATTRACT BACK MANY WHO HABITUALLY VOTE LABOR BUT THIS TIME WERE LOOKING FOR A NEW FACE.

6. AN NRP LEADER (BEN MEIR) BELIEVES THAT WITH ONE EXCEPTION HIS PARTY HAS NOT BEEN AFFECTED BY THE ALIGNMENT CHANGE OVER. HE FEELS THAT DESPITE PERES' PROMISE TO THE CONTRARY, HE IS MORE AMENABLE THAN WAS RABIN TO A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY TO INCLUDE THE LIKUD; THIS IS A CONDITION THE NRP INTENDS TO INSIST ON SHOULD IT BE NEEDED IN A FUTURE COALITION.

7. IN SUM, THE CAMPAIGN SITUATION REMAINS FLUID. WITH RABIN STILL PRIME MINISTER AND PERES' HAWKISH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IMAGE BLURRED BY HIS COMMITMENTS TO MAPAM, ALLON AND EBAN, THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE STILL REASSESSING THEIR STRATEGY--AND MEASURING THEIR PRINCIPAL OPPONENT. DUNNIGAN

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